

JUNE 30, 1978

"VANESSA"
(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: MUSIC LOVERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WHO GATHERED IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, FOR THE SECOND SPOLETO-U.S.A. ARTS FESTIVAL WERE ABLE TO ATTEND PERFORMANCES OF A RARELY-HEARD AMERICAN OPERA: SAMUEL BARBER'S "VANESSA." WITH A REPORT ON THE PRODUCTION, HERE IS _____:

TAPE: CUT ONE - VANESSA OVERTURE IN FULL THEN UNDER (RUNS N 1:30)

VOICE: WITH THAT MUSIC, THE CURTAIN IS RAISED ON SAMUEL BARBER'S HAUNTING AND BLEAK PORTRAYAL OF FRUSTRATION AND COMPROMISE "VANESSA." THE OPERA, MORE TALKED ABOUT THAN HEARD IN PERFORMANCE, HAS A CURIOUS HISTORY. COMPOSED IN 1957, VANESSA WAS EAGERLY AWAITED AS THE FIRST OPERA BY SAMUEL BARBER, WHO FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS HAD BEEN CONSIDERED ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S FINEST SYMPHONIC COMPOSERS. IF THE COMPOSER'S OPERATIC STATUS HAD YET TO BE DETERMINED, THERE WAS NO PROBLEM WITH HIS LIBRETTIST'S CREDENTIALS. GIAN-CARLO MENOTTI, A LONG TIME FRIEND OF BARBER'S, WAS WELL RESPECTED AS AN OPERATIC COMPOSER AND DIRECTOR. THE OPERA WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN WORK TO BE PREMIERED AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA IN DECADES, AND THE CRITICS GAVE THE PRODUCTION RESOUNDING PRAISE. THE WORK, DIFFICULT BOTH TO PERFORM AND TO COMPREHEND, WAS NOT PRODUCED AGAIN UNTIL THE MET RESTAGED IT IN THE MID 1960S. AGAIN, THE WORK WAS ACCLAIMED BY CRITICS AND PUBLIC BUT WAS WITHDRAWN AFTER A SINGLE SEASON. NOW, AFTER SEVERAL PRODUCTIONS OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES AND TWENTY YEARS AFTER ITS PREMIERE, VANESSA

VOICE: HAS RECEIVED A LOVING, NEW PRODUCTION. IT WAS STAGED BY
(CONT) THE LIBRETTIST AND ORIGINAL DIRECTOR GIAN CARLO MENOTTI,
AT JUNE'S SPOLETO FESTIVAL, U.S.A. AND CRITICS CAME FROM
AROUND THE WORLD TO HEAR THE WORK THAT SOME HAVE TERMED
THE GREATEST OPERA WRITTEN IN AMERICA. THE CONDUCTOR
FOR THIS NEW PRODUCTION WAS THE YOUNG AMERICAN MUSIC
DIRECTOR OF THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL, CHRISTOPHER KEENE.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- KEEN

"I FIND IT HAS A TREMENDOUS FOLLOWING, BASED ON THE
ORIGINAL CAST RECORDING RELEASED IN THE LATE FIFTIES FROM
THE METROPOLITAN OPERA. PEOPLE ARE DESPERATE TO HEAR IT.
IT'S A RATHER OBVIOUS PIECE SINCE MR. MENOTTI, WHO IS THE
FOUNDER OF THE FESTIVAL, IS ALSO THE LIBRETTIST OF THE
OPERA, THE STAGE DIRECTOR OF THE ORIGINAL PERFORMANCES
AT THE METROPOLITAN AND HAS CHAMPIONED THE WORK BOTH AT
THE ORIGINAL FESTIVAL IN ITALY, AND THE SALZBURG FESTIVAL.
WE BOTH FEEL THE WORK IS A MASTERPIECE AND HAVE WANTED
TO SEE IT REVIVED FOR SOME TIME, AND FEEL THIS IS A LOGICAL
YEAR, AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE FESTIVAL LAST YEAR, TO TAKE
A CHANCE ON A WORK SOMEWHAT LESSER KNOWN LIKE 'VANESSA!"

VOICE: THE TITLE CHARACTER, VANESSA, IS A MIDDLE AGED WOMAN
RESIDING IN A REMOTE COUNTRY HOUSE IN AN UNSPECIFIED
"NORTHERN COUNTRY." THERE SHE CARES FOR HER AGING,
RECLUSIVE MOTHER, AND HER SHY NIECE, ERIKA. SOMETHING IN
VANESSA'S PAST INVOLVING A MAN NAMED ANATOLE HAS PROVOKED
HER MOTHER TO STONEY SILENCE WITH ALL BUT ERIKA. VANESSA'S
SPIRITS ARE REVIVED WHEN SHE RECEIVES A NOTE FROM ANATOLE
INFORMING THE HOUSEHOLD THAT HE PLANS TO VISIT THEM AFTER
AN ABSENCE OF TWENTY YEARS, BUT THE VISITOR TURNS OUT
TO ANOTHER BE ANATOLE -- THE SON OF VANESSA'S SUITOR. THE
YOUNG MAN SEDUCES ERIKA THE FIRST NIGHT AND THEN, NOT
KNOWING ERIKA HAS BECOME PREGNANT, TAKES UP WITH THE OLDER,
RICHER VANESSA. ERIKA ATTEMPTS SUICIDE WHEN SHE DISCOVERS

VOICE: THAT VANESSA HAS DECIDED TO TRY TO RECAPTURE HER FADING
(CONT) YOUTH BY MARRYING THE AMORAL ANATOLE. AS VANESSA AND
ANATOLE DEPART FOR AN UNCERTAIN LIFE IN PARIS, ERIKA
DECIDES TO REMAIN WITH THE NOW COMPLETELY SILENT
GRANDMOTHER -- IT IS, SHE SINGS, NOW HER TURN TO WAIT.

BARBER'S OPERA IS OF A STUNNING EMOTIONAL DEPTH -- THE
MUSIC AT TIMES RELENTLESSLY COLD, AND FALSELY LUSH.
IT IS THE MUSIC MORE THAN THE WORDS WHICH TELL THE
LISTENER THAT LIFE IS WAITING FOR DREAMS TO COME TRUE,
DREAMS WHICH, IF REALIZED, DISAPPEAR. FOR CHRISTOPHER
KEENE, THE MUSIC REPRESENTS ONE OF SAMUEL BARBER'S FINEST
AND MOST SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS -- MUSIC BOTH CAREFULLY
WROUGHT AND ACCESSIBLE ON MANY LEVELS:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- KEENE :29

"I THINK MOST MUSICIANS ARE TREMENDOUS ADMIRERS OF MISTER
BARBER - HE'S A MUSICIAN'S MUSICIAN. THE MUSIC IS SO
BRILLIANTLY CRAFTED, SO EMOTIONALLY REWARDING THAT I
DON'T KNOW A MUSICIAN WHO DOESN'T LIKE HIS MUSIC. THE
QUALITIES OF BARBER'S MUSIC, AS WE REcede FROM THE AVANT
GARDE, TWELVE TONE PREOCCUPATIONS OF THE POSTWAR YEARS MEAN
WE ARE NOT FIGHTING THE BATTLE ANYMORE WHETHER BARBER'S
MUSIC IS OLD FASHIONED OR NOT, WE JUST HEAR IT FOR WHAT
IT IS -- BEAUTIFUL, HUMAN, COMPASSIONATE, LYRICAL MUSIC.
THOSE ARE QUALITIES I THINK HAVE ALWAYS APPEALED TO
AUDIENCES AND KEPT MUSIC ALIVE."

VOICE: THE NEW PRODUCTION AT SPOLETO, U.S.A. IN CHARLESTON,
BENEFITED GREATLY FROM CLEAR AND FIRM STAGE DIRECTION BY
MISTER MENOTTI AND CONDUCTOR KEENE'S TAUT YET FLEXIBLE
SENSE OF THE DRAMA WITHIN THE OPERA. THE PRINCIPAL
SINGERS WON LENGTHY OVATIONS FROM THE LARGE AUDIENCES,
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION GOING TO JOHANNA MEIER'S DRAMATIC
VANESSA AND THE SLIGHTLY UNDERPLAYED ERIKA OF THE YOUNG

VOICE: AMERICAN SOPRANO KATHERINE CIESINSKI. THE SETS, IN
(CONT) APPROPRIATELY FADED VICTORIAN SHADES OF BROWN AND PURPLE,
EVOKED AN ELEGANCE THAT HAD PASSED FROM VANESSA'S LIFE
INTO FAINTLY-HELD MEMORY.

THE ONE POINT WHICH SEEMED TO GIVE THE AUDIENCE THE MOST
DIFFICULTY WAS, SURPRISINGLY, BARBER'S NATURAL CHOICE
OF ENGLISH AS THE LANGUAGE OF THE OPERA:

TAPE: EUT FOUR -- KEENE

"ONE OF THE THINGS IS ITS MUCH EASIER FOR AN AMERICAN
AUDIENCE TO LISTEN TO ITALIAN BEING SONG, WHICH THEY
REALLY CAN'T COMPREHEND BECAUSE THEY REALLY STOP TRYING
TO FOLLOW WHAT'S BEING SAID. WHEN YOU HEAR AN OPERA SONG
IN ENGLISH YOU INSIST THAT IT BE PRONOUNCED CORRECTLY
OR ELSE IT'S VERY CONFUSING TO SORT OF HALF UNDERSTAND
WHAT'S GOING ON. I THINK ANY LANGUAGE LENDS ITSELF TO
BEING SONG AS LONG AS IT'S SONG INTELLIGENTLY."

VOICE: ASIDE FROM THE ATTENTION THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN FOCUSED ON
THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL, THIS YEAR'S PRODUCTION OF VANESSA
CARRIES THE ADDITIONAL IMPACT OF HAVING BEEN RECORDED
AND VIDEOTAPED AFTER THE FESTIVAL FOR LATER SHOWING
NATIONWIDE. IN A SENSE, THE SPOLETO PERFORMANCE WILL
BECOME A NATIONALLY DEFINITIVE VERSION:

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- KEENE

"THIS IS THE SECOND YEAR WHICH WE'VE TELEVISED NATIONWIDE
ON OPERA, LAST YEAR IT WAS MENOTTI'S 'THE CONSUL,' AND THIS
YEAR 'VANESSA.' WE HOPE THAT WILL CONTINUE AND EXPAND,
BECAUSE I THINK EVERYBODY RECOGNIZES THAT THE MEDIA ARE
THE ANSWER TO THE VAST AUDIENCE WE NEED TO KEEP THE ARTS
ALIVE IN THIS COUNTRY. IT'S ONLY BY REACHING TRULY
MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THAT WE'RE GOING TO
GENERATE THE KIND OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS THAT IT'S
GOING TO TAKE TO SUPPORT THE ARTISTIC ESTABLISHMENT IN
THIS TIME OF INFLATION AND GROWING NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS."

VOICE: CHRISTOPHER KEENE, MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE SPOLETO, FESTIVAL
U.S.A. IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND CONDUCTOR OF

VOICE: THE WIDELY ACCLAIMED NEW PRODUCTION OF SAMUEL BARBER'S
(CONT) EQUALLY ACCLAIMED OPERA, "VANESSA."

TAPE: CUT SIX - MUSIC FROM ACT IN QUINTET

-0-

BML/PY